



United States
Department of
Agriculture

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Office of the
Assistant Secretary
for Administration

1400 Independence
Avenue SW

Washington, DC
20250-0103

TO: Human Pandemic Action Planners

FROM: Gilbert L. Smith
Deputy Assistant Secretary
for Administration

SUBJECT: Human Pandemic Planning Update

As the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Administration, I want to update you on activity with the Department's human pandemic planning activities. The Deputy Coordinators, Action Officers, and Local Coordinators remain in place. Assistant Secretary Rutherford has asked me to serve as the operational lead for the project. The work done to date by staff members and Mr. Thomas continues to be the foundation for our program as we move forward. Pandemic planning remains a priority for the Department, and we are now positioned to further develop the program and plans.

Recently, a low-pathogenicity strain of H5N1 was found in Mute Swans, Michigan. This strain has been detected several times in wild birds in North America and poses no threat to human health. We are fortunate that, to date, there have not been any human cases of Avian Influenza documented in North America nor has a high-path strain of H5N1 reached into our avian communities and poultry stocks. Further, the World Health Organization, the Centers for Disease Control, and governments around the world have not identified a case of human-to-human transmission of the virus.

While our plan is driven by the National Strategy for Pandemic Influenza, it is also relevant in other contexts that may contribute to a reduction in available workforce to meet our mission. So far, we have identified a management structure to handle these incidents. Soon we'll move forward with putting policies and procedures in place for direct operations during a pandemic or a situation that reduces staffing to an extent that mission capability is potentially impacted. I am reassured that many plans are already in place as a result of your certifications earlier this year.

When we think of operations within the context of a pandemic and a projected potential reduction of available workforce exceeding 40 percent, we often think of our mission as the day-to-day operations that we conduct as part of our normal business operating tempo. However, when we consider that during a pandemic, potentially driven by a pathogen based in livestock, poultry, or our food supply, many of our mission areas will experience an acceleration of operations during a time when staffing may be substantially reduced. Compounding this scenario is the likelihood that one of many other outside agents e.g., weather, natural events, wildfire,

terrorism, unique regional issues, could further impact our mission during this workforce crisis.

We are now sharpening our focus on the provision of critical citizen services and services to our customers in industry. As we develop our requirements, I will be challenging our Action Officers to reconsider (and communicate) our critical services upon which the Nation will count during a pandemic and to further consider the needs of those areas if that mission were to be accelerated. In our upcoming meeting on Wednesday, September 20, 2006, you will receive an abbreviated survey where we will ask you to clarify those public services and how you will meet some continuity of government requirements with a reduced workforce.

In the near future, I will also be asking you to review and perhaps even test communication systems and plans within your organizations. Communication with points of contact in the State and local authorities will also need to be tested or verified (See page 10, USDA Guidance Planning Action Items, Stage 3.2). In the USDA Pandemic Plan, there is guidance as to workplace and operational flexibilities available to management during such a time. Please review this guidance and consider how you would proceed to implementation.

Another area of focus will be Stages 5.1 and 5.2 of the USDA guidance (page 11). We must develop a means to track and report the status of our workforce on a National, regional, and local basis. A key item in this strategy is being able to identify our employees and communicate their status to a central location. One of the next processes we hope to put in place is a reporting method that, when activated, will give us regular updates as to the state of our workforce and the status of organizations in terms of the ability to meet mission. We are beginning to evaluate some software products and existing processes in other Departments and Agencies that may meet our needs. Departmental Administrative Managers and Mission Area Personnel Officers will serve a critical role in developing these processes.

I intend to build on the mission focused foundation of work that Mr. Thomas and the team have already accomplished. Through our work and your support, we can build a system with processes that benefit the Department not only in support of a pandemic occurrence, but also, in support of any case where an area experiences an unexpected reduction or dislocation of the workforce as a result of an outside agent or natural disaster.

I encourage each of you to stay informed and engaged in personal and professional preparations with your families and your communities. As a reminder, the Department of Health and Human Services has prepared excellent materials that you

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will find useful as you make your personal preparation plans at www.pandemicflu.gov. You can find USDA specific employee information at www.usda.gov/oo/beprepared. I am proud to support this effort and am energized by the work already done. I'm also motivated by the opportunity we have to make a real difference for the Department and our colleagues in what could be critical moments in the history of our Nation.